

E-BULLETIN #87

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 163

broken but not destroyed...



Quite a few participants of the 40 days of the Cenacle Retreat held at the Cenacle Ashram, Bilaspur, India, are broken individuals, psychologically and spiritually. Many have fallen on the way, knowingly or unknowingly, suffering different degrees of damage. Many of them come with the conviction that their experiences are unique and are of the worst category. But as the participants begin to share their own life stories, the awareness grows that not many really escape the falls, small or big. This is not to say that there are not participants with personal integrity and vocational consistency. The difference may be that, although they too might have fallen, they had the wisdom and strength to get up and walk once again.

In fact, human life itself can be compared to an earthen vessel, precious and beautiful but, at the same time, delicate and fragile.

Our brokenness does not essentially and intrinsically tarnish our God-given worth as the image and likeness of our own Creator. Our brokenness is often part of our inability to recognise and realise such inner beauty of our being. What prayer could be more meaningful than this prayer of the Psalmist: *"Lord, I thank you for the wonder of my being"* (cfr. Ps. 138, 14)?

Distortions of this divine image can creep into us as we struggle through our life-journey. Self-perception can become clouded in guilt and shame. Some might fall into utter darkness as well, as in the case of severe depression, an experience of an endless dark tunnel with no escape route. In such cases, life can even be nipped in the bud.

Religiously consecrated persons too do not escape these dangers. While their vocation is to be "perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect" (cfr. Mt 5, 48), they are also owners of an earthen vessel, their own humanity. Our inner strength will depend not so much on denying our mortal nature but in accepting it in the light of God's grace. That is why openness to the experience of divine mercy on a daily basis is what keeps us constantly in line with the navigator, the Holy Spirit.

Just as physical exercises keep our physical body flexible and athletic, the profound awareness and acceptance of our existential poverty before God keeps our spiritual self ever open to the redeeming love of Jesus. He was broken in order to make us whole; he lowered himself in order to raise us up to the supreme privilege of being God's children.

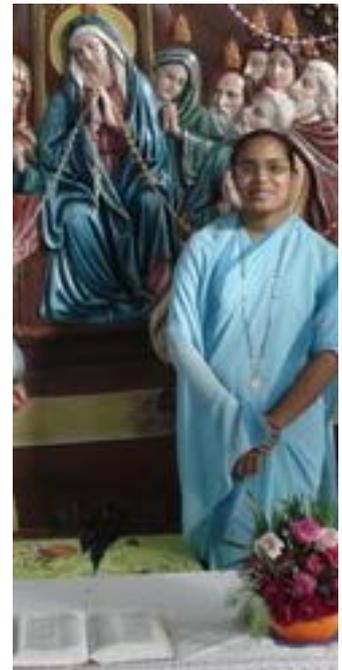
In this sense, our perceived and feared weaknesses actually become the source of our strength. As St Paul says, “when I am weak, then I am strong in Christ Jesus” (cfr. 2 Cor 12, 10).

Therefore, the aim of religious formation, or human formation for that matter, is not so much to transform us into perfect beings in a couple of years – an impossible task – but to teach us to get up and walk when we fall by the wayside every now and then. At times we can get up by ourselves, most often we need the help of others, and always we need the helping and forgiving hands of our Creator.

In short we can be broken, and inevitably we will be. But we should not be destroyed – we can be broken in order to be healed.

Speaking of divine mercy, Pope Francis said on 7th April 2013:

“My merit is God’s mercy. I am by no means lacking merits as long as He is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are manifold, I too will abound in merits. This is important: the courage to trust in Jesus’ mercy, to trust in His patience, to seek refuge always in the wounds of His love.”



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item 164

‘mission’...paradigm shift!

What is mission? Young minds of today will surely be reminded of the popular Hollywood series of spy films *Mission: Impossible!* where the hero and his team carry out thrilling and difficult adventures successfully by using the latest technologies.

Today the world is greatly influenced by science. There is an altogether different religion called Scientism. It denies God as the creator of the universe, and of man, and holds that the human race was not created but evolved from lower forms of life. Evolution, not creation, is taught in thousands of schools and colleges as the only possible view.

In such a world what should be our idea/understanding of ‘mission’?



The New Catholic Encyclopaedia’s response is that it is ‘*basically a question of faith and the practical shape taken by faith. It is fundamentally spirituality or a religious conviction. As such, it is a ‘being’ by becoming a ‘doing’ but it is not a ‘being’ without ‘doing’.* Mission is born in the heart of God’s loving dialogue with the world, through creation and redemption.’

Christians are mostly conscious of belonging to a single great worldwide fellowship, regardless of the denominational label they may bear. Several, though not all, are ardent supporters of contemporary ecumenical movements for unity and renewal in the Church. If they are correct the word ‘mission’ may be in need of new and contemporary definition. But right from Jerusalem onwards the

definition of mission has not been clear. 'Mission' has been understood as doing of good deeds, humanization effort, programmes of social and political action, different welfare activities, inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, and inter-Church relationships. One might recall Stephen Neil's famous statement, "when everything is mission then nothing is mission!"

In the 19th and 20th centuries mission was understood, among other things, as originating from God, mediating salvation, ministry by the whole people of God, witness to people of different faiths, theology, and action in hope. Bosch suggests that all the paradigms are valid and should be incorporated in an understanding of mission, which transforms reality and which, in itself, is in need of constant transforming.

Traditionally, mission was understood as 'sending' and not much importance was given to 'bringing' and 'incorporation'. Evangelism should result in conversion to Christ and his Church. Mission may, and frequently will, involve the crossing of ethnic, cultural, or other boundaries (Acts1:8). The ultimate goal of mission is that "God may be all in all" (1Cor 15: 28), that is the complete presence of the kingdom of God here on earth.

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI speaks of mission in terms of task, function and duty of evangelization. However these topics are not reflected upon in depth because of the emphasis laid on specific issues such as social development, liberation, inculturation and dialogue. From the holistic point of view, 'mission' must be concerned with the whole individual and society. It must be concerned with the body as well as the soul. The Church is very much responsible for the social and political transformation of society. So it must look into matters of health care, education, agriculture, justice and freedom of people, while not forgetting its prime aim of saving souls.

Indeed the Church does not have a mission, it does not possess the salvation it wants to share with the world. The Church has received the gift of participating in the creative and liberative task of the Triune God. Mission is the heartbeat of God. Hence the glorious privilege and awesome responsibility of the Church's mission is not an addition to the other functions of the Church. It is not an activity that can be pursued after establishing ecclesial structures and programmes.

Although from the beginning we have characterized mission as a hard and complex task, at this juncture it does not seem impossible but it is only a matter of faithfully pursuing the work that the Father began by sending the Son and the Spirit into the world.

In a nutshell if we had to express the theme of the Church's mission through an image, we could give it a title that is opposite of the famous film series – *Mission: Possible!*



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you commented...

on #86